S.M.A.R.T. Goals

When it's time to set goals, we like to say, "It's time to get SMART." S.M.A.R.T.

S is for specific. Any goal set needs to be specific. For example, don't just say, "I'd like you to improve communication." That isn't a specific goal. A specific goal would, be "I'd like you to attend two Human Resource Development classes on communication. Then write a short summary and share it with me at one of our one-on-one meetings by February 1". This is a specific goal. And pretty much covers the rest—SMART.

M is for measurable. Goals must be measurable. A goal needs to be quantified. Statements like, "I'm not sure how we're going to measure success" clearly show the goal isn't measurable. A great example of a measurable goal is to ask an employee to give you three ways he or she can improve their role in the organization, by a specific date and time. Now there is a measurable goal. It will be clear if the goal is accomplished or not.

A is for achievable. The whole point of a goal is that it can be attained. Goals don't need to be so grand that it's impossible to achieve them. Help employees make their goals reachable. Not easy or simple, but achievable. For example, make sure the timeline is feasible. Make sure the goal is something he or she will have the capacity to accomplish. Making sure the goal is (S) Specific and (M) Measurable will help make a goal (A) achievable.

R is for relevant. Goals should be relevant to the job, to your team, to your department, or to a task the employee does everyday. Goals need to be relevant to the employee's future; something that might improve job prospects or reach an aspiration he or she may have professionally.

T is for timely or time bound. This part of goal planning is very specific. An employee's goal must happen in a measurable amount of time. For example, saying, "I want the first half of this goal done by our mid-year check-in 6 months from now" is not only measurable, but also set for a specific time.

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